Marshall Memo 838

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 25, 2020

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"You gotta make it a priority to make your priorities a priority."

Richie Norton, quoted in "School Schedules That Reflect Values and Priorities" by Lena Kushnir in *HaYidion*, Spring 2020

"Trying to interact with other humans without being able to smile is the facial equivalent of communicating via text message; it's easy to be misunderstood."

Belinda Luscombe in "When in Doubt, Just Assume I'm Smiling" in *Time*, June 1-8, 2020, (Vol. 125, #20-21, p. 24)

"The point of teaching the arts is not to help students improve their performance in other subject areas – there's little to no clear evidence that the study of music, dance, or other arts will lead to better test scores in math, English, or chemistry. Rather, we teach the arts because they are a powerful means by which to interact with the world. And the more we practice and develop our artistic talents, the better we are able to craft, express, imagine, observe, persist, reflect, explore, and understand and enjoy the work of other artists…"

Linda Nathan in "Joyful Learning At Scale: Immersing Students in the Arts" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2020 (Vol. 101, #8, pp. 8-14); Nathan can be reached at lfnathan@gmail.com

"A first priority for schools should always be fulfilling their roles as democratic institutions that support a flourishing human community. Right now, our flourishing demands we place an emphasis on protecting health, and that encompasses mental health."

William Penuel in "The New Normal Could Be Better Than the Old One. A Learning Scientist Explains Why," The National Education Policy Center, May 21, 2020

"Students need to become friends with poetry. They need to know that poems can comfort them, make them laugh, help them remember, and nurture them to know and understand themselves, others, and the world around them more completely. When poetry is woven into the fabric of the everyday life of the classroom, it opens a window into a world outside of the classroom; it leads students to see the magic of the everyday, ordinary worlds all around them. Students begin to think in poetry, to speak poetry, and to read and write poetry naturally."

Georgia Heard in "Teaching Poetry in 'Playful' Ways" in *Education Week Teacher*, May 21, 2020; Heard suggests reading a poem every day.

"Education as a field is extraordinarily bad at remembering what we've tried before… Forgetting our past can lead to either underpromise or overpromise, depending on whether we've forgotten evidence of effectiveness or uselessness."

Daniel Willingham and Andrew Rotherham in "Education's Research Problem" in *Educational Leadership*, May 2020 (Vol. 77, #8, pp. 70-75); the authors can be reached at willingham@virginia.edu and andy@bellwethereducation.org.

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1. Jennifer Gonzalez Looks Over the Horizon

"Probably the only thing that's certain right now is that no one knows for sure what the next school year is going to look like," says Jennifer Gonzalez in this *Cult of Pedagogy* article. She goes on to share ideas she's gathered from numerous sources (including Larry Ferlazzo) on what might happen in the fall:

• *Ideas for reopening* - "Alrighty then. Deep breath," she says. "Here are some ideas that look like they might sort of kind of work."

- Alternating days (or half days) – Schools would run an A/B schedule, with some students coming on A days and others on B days, with those not in school doing remote learning.
- Cohorts – Small groups of students stay put all day, with teachers moving from classroom to classroom, which minimizes mixing.
- Selective return of grade levels, students, or teachers – For example, kindergarten students return and educators with health risks work online.
- Intensives – Students stay with the same teacher/class/course for a few weeks, then rotate to the next course, again minimizing mixing and movement in the building.
- One-room schoolhouse – Students stay in the same room, with the same teacher, covering all subjects, perhaps with students doing cross-disciplinary project-based learning. This could work remotely or with split classes to maximize distancing.

- Individual learning plans – This might come down to five or six plans for a classroom, with Plan 1 being full-time home instruction with paper-based curriculum, Plan 2 full-time home instruction with robust technology, Plan 3 coming to school some days, etc.
- Keep distance learning – "Obviously, getting all students connected is a must," says Gonzalez, "or at the very least finding good, workable ways to stay in touch without the Internet, but if that's possible, it may be the most realistic approach at least for the start of the school year."

• *Other considerations* – These are other ideas Gonzalez believes are worth considering, regardless of which approach is used.

- Acceleration versus remediation – Post-Katrina research in New Orleans schools showed that moving ahead with the curriculum, with backfilling and scaffolding, worked best.
- All-community outreach – Getting input from educators, parents, students, and others, then running draft proposals by them, is vital to success.
- Focusing on equity and culturally responsive teaching – The hardest-hit students will need particular attention.
- Looping – When teachers keep the same students into the 2020-21 school year, they can build on established relationships and have a better handle on what students know and can do.
- Substitutes - Availability of additional staff is important, but many subs are over 55, which might create health concerns if they're on site.
- Childcare for educators – "Many, many teachers are also parents," says Gonzalez, "so if their own children can't go back to school full-time, that poses a significant problem for teachers as well."

• *Facing the unknown* – Rather than lapsing into "a state of paralysis, waiting for someone to tell you what the plan is," Gonzalez has these thoughts:

- Prepare for a full year of 100 percent distance learning. "Even if your school manages to get kids into the building," she says, "social distancing will likely require students to get their materials and do much of their work on devices." There's lots of accumulated wisdom out there about how to do this effectively.
- Create contingency plans. Be ready for different scenarios.
- Give yourself space to grieve. "Although dwelling on this for long periods of time won't be terribly useful," she says, "it doesn't help to pretend any of this is normal."
- Push back on unreasonable expectations. "Although high-quality instruction is obviously the goal," says Gonzalez, "sending a message that denies current challenges can crush teachers' spirits."

"Good teaching is an intimate experience," she concludes, "and most teachers are at their best when they can stand close to students, examine their work, give hugs and high-fives, have private conversations… Over the last ten years or so, as smartphones took over and we got more and more addicted to screens, we've all collectively shaken our heads at how disconnected we had become. But this pandemic has demonstrated that we weren't actually disconnected. Yes, the devices made things different, but the whole time we were still finding

ways to be close, to touch each other, to share physical space. It turns out we really do need that, and I think this is wonderful news."

"Reopening School: What It Might Look Like" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *Cult of Pedagogy*, May 24, 2020

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2. A Veteran Online Teacher Shares What He's Learned

"Ultimately, we want students to take ownership of and lead their learning, and that's even more necessary in a virtual space," says teacher/consultant John McCarthy in this article in *Edutopia*. Here's what McCarthy has learned from years of virtual teaching:

• *Develop a plan for students' asynchronous work*. A great benefit of virtual instruction is that students can choose when and how many times they'll watch videos (including teacher lectures), read texts, answer questions, and submit responses to be viewed by peers and teachers. Communication can be via message boards, e-mail, and instant messaging. Not all students can handle this flexibility at first, so teacher monitoring and guidance are essential. McCarthy suggests:

- Establish structures and milestones to help students manage time and deliverables.
- Provide a variety of assignments and a choice of response formats – definitely not a steady diet of worksheets!
- Make the content relevant to authentic purposes outside school.
- Curate and publish students' work (perhaps in a Google folder) for a target audience, perhaps a community organization (this may require parent permission).

Everything should build students' ability to work independently and take increasing responsibility for managing their time and monitoring their own work.

• *Use synchronous meetings for live support*. This can be all-class meetings (not lectures, which are best conveyed as videos), chats with half the class at a time, small-group tutoring, one-on-one coaching, and office hours. The goals of strategically timed live connections are (a) addressing learning gaps picked up by assessments, and (b) encouraging in-depth learning by addressing core concepts, stimulating real-time discussion, pointing out misconceptions and misunderstandings, encouraging students to speak up about what they know and what they don't understand, and showing models of good thinking and speaking.

• *Give prompt and responsive feedback*. "When students are working on their own, gaps in understanding happen," says McCarthy, "so they really need feedback for revisions." His suggestions:

- Commit to replying to students' e-mails, texts, and instant messages within 30-120 minutes.
- When students are responding to each other's posts, chime in, conveying: *I am supervising what you're posting and I'm interested in your work.*
- Respond to students' submitted assignments within 24-48 hours.

Online learning has the potential, perhaps more than in-school work, for students getting timely, helpful feedback from peers and instructors and continuously improving their work.

• *Make time for relationships*. "Remember that working from home for many students is a more challenging adjustment for them than it is for you," says McCarthy. "We do not know everything that is a stressor at home. Be a supporter, not another obstacle." He suggests checking in with every student every week through offline and real-time conversations, including the all-important question: "How are you doing?"

"4 Key Aspects of Teaching an Online Class" by John McCarthy in *Edutopia*, April 24, 2020

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3. The Kind of Tutoring We'll Need in the Months Ahead

In this article in *Brookings*, Matthew Kraft (Brown University) and Michael Goldstein (Match Education) applaud several initiatives to recruit college students and recent graduates to tutor students who have fallen behind during the school closure crisis. Not only will such programs help address "Covid slide," but they will act as an economic stimulus and fill in for the many internships and summer jobs that have been cancelled.

But Kraft and Goldstein caution that tutoring isn't guaranteed to help. "The standard model of tutoring – a rotating cast of volunteers who sporadically show up to after-school or summer programs – doesn't typically succeed," they say. Billions of No Child Left Behind dollars were spent on this approach, and evaluations found little evidence of student learning gains.

Fortunately there's solid, gold-standard research on "high-dosage tutoring," which has the following characteristics:

- Tutors work full time with the same students through the school year, building relationships that pay off over time.
- Tutoring is personalized, with no more than a one-to-one or two-to-one ratio.
- All students in a school get tutoring, not just those with learning deficits. "Tutoring only struggling students attaches a stigma to the program," say Kraft and Goldstein, "and is often perceived as a punishment."
- Tutoring is a regular, daily, full-period class, not after school (which, again, feels punitive).
- Students get report card grades for tutoring, signaling its importance.
- Tutoring in math will have the biggest impact, since learning loss is likely most severe in this subject and tutors can address discrete skills and knowledge.

Kraft and Goldstein suggest forming a National Tutor Corps, along the lines of AmeriCorps, and focusing on (a) the absolute minimum of red tape, (b) careful recruiting and selection (it's helpful to get feedback from students as candidates conduct 10-minute tutoring sessions), and (c) constant assessment and feedback as the program proceeds. There's some evidence that high-dosage tutoring can be conducted remotely.

"Getting Tutoring Right to Reduce Covid-19 Learning Loss" by Matthew Kraft and Michael Goldstein in *Brookings*, May 21, 2020

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4. Covid-Era Practices That Should Continue After the Pandemic

In this article in *Education Week Teacher*, teacher/author Gina Denny says the school-closure crisis "has given us insights and tools to better serve our students." She lists six ways she plans to change "once there is a semblance of normal":

• *Use online technology routinely to deliver assignments, notes, and resources*. These months have brought millions of educators and students up to speed on Google Classroom and other platforms. This will serve them well, even in standard-issue schooling, and also in college, where a fair amount of instruction is online.

• *Stop grading formative assignments*. Remote schooling has deemphasized grades, which has showcased the benefits of feedback for improvement versus summative judgment. "Fewer assignments with more detailed feedback can help students stay motivated," says Denny, "understand the material more fully, and alleviate some of the pressure on teachers, even when giving individual feedback takes more time than right-wrong grading."

• *Assign home-based performance tasks and projects*. Remote schooling has required students to upload choreographed dances, scripted scenes, and music performance for teachers' critiques – great for avoiding snarky comments from peers and excellent preparation for college and real-world auditions.

• *Bring other professionals into the loop*. Many educators have become less shy about recruiting actors, musicians, authors, politicians, and activists to interact virtually with their students. No reason this shouldn't continue.

• *Create a more-flexible schedule*. Teachers have often been surprised to see students who performed well in "regular" school floundering in stay-at-home schooling – and students who felt stifled by a bell schedule and micro-assignments flourishing with less structure. This suggests that a loose-tight approach might be better when regular school resumes, giving students more control over their time while holding them accountable for results and becoming more self-sufficient with time management.

• *Force students to use "old people" technology*. "Kids who plan to enter the workforce in the next decade," says Denny, "need to know how to use Microsoft Office, properly thread e-mails, and use technology to manage their workflow."

"6 Classroom Changes Teachers Will Make When Schools Reopen" by Gina Denny in *Education Week Teacher*, May 18, 2020

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5. Measuring Social-Emotional Learning

In this article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, Madora Soutter (Villanova University) remembers that as an elementary teacher, she was skeptical about measuring students' social-emotional characteristics. She bridled at the idea of putting SEL data on a report card, compiling growth charts, and giving students stickers if they hit certain benchmarks. But her work with EL Education has brought a different perspective. This network of 150+ schools has begun to

measure students' social-emotional learning and equitable learning environments, with particular attention to how student subgroups are doing and whether EL's explicit focus on character-education is bearing fruit. "Their measurement efforts," says Soutter, "provide a promising example of how schools might reconcile their desire for concrete, formative data about individual students' social and emotional development with an emphasis on the larger school environment and its contribution to making learning joyful."

EL Education's assessment toolbox addresses three character-building aspirations for the network's students:

- Becoming effective learners – Measuring growth mindset and self-management;
- Becoming ethical people – Empathy, perspective-taking, and compassion;
- Contributing to a better world – Civic responsibility and civic empowerment.

School leaders in the EL network look at the character data to see how their schools are doing over time, and whether there are differences by student subgroup. Further data come from a walkthrough tool, which is used by school leaders and teachers to observe classrooms and nonacademic spaces and assess how well students' social and emotional well-being is being supported by educators and peers.

"By examining survey data and walkthrough data in relation to one another," says Soutter, "EL Education schools are able to identify patterns and red flags… What is the evidence that students are being kind and empathetic? How can the teachers within the school learn from each other's practices? Is there evidence that social-emotional skills are transferring beyond the classroom (e.g., to lunch, recess, or pickup time)?" Data are discussed by staff and shared with students, looking for what's going well and what needs to be improved. Importantly, this information is not used for high-stakes decisions such as ranking students, accountability, or comparing schools to each other.

Soutter is convinced of the value of accurately assessing social-emotional learning, especially since there are so many SEL programs being promoted, some of dubious quality. But she still remembers how she felt as a teacher. Sometimes, she says, educators and students "need to put those tools down, walk outside with our students, marvel at the clouds they are pointing to, and be joyful – and not try to measure it."

"Measuring Joy: A Social Justice Issue" by Madora Soutter in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2020 (Vol. 101, #8, pp. 25-30), available to PDK members and for purchase; Soutter can be reached at madora.soutter@villanova.edu.

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6. School Leadership Guided by Brain Research

(Originally titled "Retraining the Brain")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, consultant/leadership coach Jill Harrison Berg says that when student achievement results reveal patterns of underachievement by race, gender, and home language, some educators respond with defensiveness and excuses. "When the going gets tough," says Berg, "our brains want to fight or flee." But in her equity work in schools, she's seen educators take troubling results as a challenge "to become aware of a

previously hidden gap in their professional knowledge, and as an impetus to drive into an important journey of learning, collaboration, and experimentation."

Drawing on the work of Zaretta Hammond (*Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, 2014), Berg points to six brain-based tendencies in schools that principals and teacher leaders need to understand and leverage:

• *Tendency #1: Congeniality* – Many schools still embrace norms of classroom autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority. Berg urges leaders to provide time and meeting protocols that encourage sharing ideas, respect the contributions of colleagues, and foster risk-taking, courage, and difficult conversations.

• *Tendency #2: Being closed to feedback from those we don't like* – The key leadership task here is creating a psychologically safe climate and fostering norms that honor all individuals' perspectives.

• *Tendency #3: Letting cultural preferences guide how we take in information* – Leaders need to build in meeting time for reflecting on faculty and student differences and how to see them as opportunities, not threats.

• *Tendency #4 and 5: Students' need to (a) have their interest piqued and (b) see connections to prior experiences* – These are constant challenges for teachers, especially across cultural divides, and leaders should make them an ongoing topic of discussion.

• *Tendency #6: Our brains' drive to do more-complex thinking and learning* – Leaders' work is harnessing and aligning this positive (but potentially scattered) energy for the collective mission.

"Retraining the Brain" by Jill Harrison Berg in *Educational Leadership* May 2020 (Vol. 77, #8, pp. 86-87)

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7. The Words Students Need to Be Able to Read Fluently

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Elfrieda Hiebert (TextProject) says vocabulary knowledge is a major factor in becoming a proficient reader. "When students' vocabularies are not large on entering school," she says, "students' prospects for reading success depend on the richness of their school experience." Helping low-vocabulary students to catch up would seem to be Job One for educators. Not so, says Hiebert. The biggest challenge is "the tidal wave of words in the English dictionary." One study found that K-12 school texts contain more than 150,000 different words; that's half of the 300,000 words in the English language, and even that is an undercount because of all the multiple meanings.

How should schools tackle this gargantuan list? One method that's not working, says Hiebert, is teaching 6-8 vocabulary words when reading a story. For example, the target words from one passage in a third-grade basal reader are *batted, buzzing, clattered, fetch, rattles, rough, slick, sniff,* and *thumped*. The problem, says Hiebert, is that all but one of these words will appear rarely in texts that students will read in the future. What's more, all the words have easily recognized synonyms (e.g., *fetch/get*), so after a week of instruction, students' vocabularies will have grown hardly at all. Such a myopic approach won't make much

headway on those 150,000 words.

But which vocabulary *should* be taught? The widely used three-tier strategy focuses on Tier 2 – general academic words (versus everyday words in Tier 1 and technical words in Tier 3). Another approach chooses "the words worth teaching." Neither of these has shown good results, says Hiebert. The good news is that digital technology has opened the door to a better approach. By scanning the millions of words in K-12 texts, Hiebert and her colleagues have been able to identify a core vocabulary that makes up 90 percent of the words students will be reading. Having mastered these words, students should be able to read most school texts with fluency. Here was the two-step sieve that Hiebert et al. used:

- Words with moderate to high frequency in school texts – there were 5,586;
- Sorting these words into groups with common roots (e.g., *help, helping, helpless, unhelpful*); on average, there were five in each morphological family, reducing the core vocabulary list to 2,451 word families;

Hiebert and colleagues scanned all 200 texts identified in Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards to see if this core vocabulary made up at least 90 percent of the words. They were 91.5 percent of the K-12 texts, with 97 percent in K-1 texts and 89 percent at grade 11. Interestingly, only 153 word families were added at the high-school level.

Of course it's not enough for students to memorize the 2,500 word families. Teachers need to make semantic connections (for example, linking the core word *sick* with words like *disease, germs, cold, fever*); make morphological connections (e.g., *sick, sicker, sickest; invite, invited, inviting, invites*); and teach the multiple meanings of many of the core words (e.g., *can, bill, sink, current*). It's helpful that a good portion of the core words describe concrete objects – easy for students to learn – and many words are already in children's speaking vocabularies when they enter school.

Hiebert shares these insights on how students can learn the 2,500 core families and further expand their vocabularies:

- Extensive reading;
- Classroom conversations that highlight core vocabulary and intriguing uses of words;
- Minilessons on core vocabulary identifying multiple meanings across subject areas, morphological families, and real-world applications.
- Ranging beyond the core vocabulary.

"The Core Vocabulary: The Foundation of Proficient Comprehension" by Elfrieda Hiebert in *The Reading Teacher*, May/June 2020 (Vol. 73, #6, pp. 757-768); Hiebert can be reached at hiebert@textproject.org.

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8. How Overachievement Can Mask Childhood Trauma

(Originally titled "The Trauma We Don't See")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, educator/activist Deena Simmons remembers that when she was in third grade, she was so terrified by gunshots exploding close to the windows of her family's one-bedroom apartment that she threw up every night. Through a lot

of hard work in school, Simmons graduated with honors and has excelled professionally, "but underneath it all," she says, "I am still on my healing journey, still putting myself back together. Through self-work and support, I have learned that my trauma manifests in my overachievement – and the resulting lack of sleep – because overworking is something I *can* control."

With many children, toxic stress produces anxiety, depression, health problems, acting out, dropping out, drug abuse, and more. The fact that some do well despite horrific conditions is puzzling, and Simmons wonders how many students are repressing trauma and need more support. "Too often," she says, "the trauma of high achievers, especially those of color, goes unrecognized because their achievements are sometimes mistaken for resilience. While some of us may be excelling thanks to having a caring adult and other supports in our lives, the scars of our past remain, and we are still in need of care, love, and healing."

Educators need to connect with all students, she concludes, and not assume that the shining stars are invulnerable. And of course schools need to be run in ways that don't add to trauma.

"The Trauma We Don't See" by Dena Simmons in *Educational Leadership* May 2020 (Vol. 77, #8, pp. 88-89)

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9. Short Items:

a. A webinar on Preparing for School Reopening – This webinar, scheduled for Thursday, May 28 at 3:00-4:30 p.m. Eastern, is sponsored by Research for Better Teaching. It will address the myriad issues ahead for the fall. There are ten speakers, including Jon Saphier, Deb Reed, Jay McTighe, and Craig Martin.

"How Will We Prepare for the Return to School?" RBT Webinar Series

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b. Literature podcasts – Memphis teacher Christy Shriver works with How to Love Lit Learning, a nonprofit that produces free podcasts to supplement classroom studies of great literature. This month's edition is the final episode of a discussion of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Other studies are available on the website: *The Scarlet Letter*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Of Mice and Men, Raisin in the Sun,* and *Animal Farm*. There are also studies of poets and writers, including Paulo Neruda, Frederick Douglass, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Shriver can be reached at christy@howtolovelitpodcast.com.

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c. Young Adult Novels – This feature in *School Library Journal* has brief descriptions of 13 young adult romance novels, with grade-level recommendations.

"Meet-Cutes Come in All Colors: 13 Irresistible YA Romances" by Desiree Thomas in *School Library Journal*, May 11, 2020

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d. What Students Are Reading – This *School Library Journal* feature lists what students at different grade levels are reading during the school-closure crisis; many of the books have direct links.

"What Are Kids Reading Now? Follett Reveals the Top E-book and Audiobook Checkouts" by Kathy Ishizuka in *School Library Journal*, April 29, 2020

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 50 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

Subscriptions:

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine